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De Steel - The New Napoleon ~ 1896

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THE NEW NAPOLEON

A SATIRE

BY

M. DE STEEL c

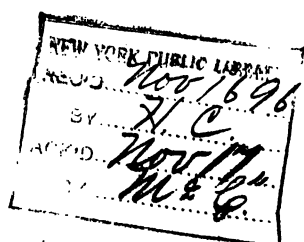
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THE NEW NAPOLEON.

A SATIRE.

Nature and Time have used the mirror's art
And everything hath had its counterpart ;
From God to man, from man to butterfly,
Some mirrored true and many much awry.
Each mortal hath his double, good or poor,
And every great man hath his caricature.
But men, great race, most quintessential class,
Are not content to leave it to the glass ;
One sees himself a likeness to a dead
And honoured hero, straight he crooks his head, 10
And sets his shoulders, elevates his chin,
Puffs out his breast and draws his belly in,
And thinks that people whisper as they go :
" There's a great man ! He looks like so-and-so !"
While one fool combs his hair Napoleonic
Another does his best to look Byronic.
Perchance you have a crooked neck ; then soon
Prepare to lead an army to the moon ;
For Alexander had a crooked neck,
And conquering, sighed for other worlds to wreck. 20



A mimic mountain covers up the mole,
A mirror shows the body, not the soul,
Nature and Time may coin the counterfeit
Of Shakspeare's face but not of Shakspeare's wit.

' The little counterfeits of life let pass,
What matter if the smaller coin be brass?
Let women pad their bosoms and their legs,
And men increase their height with wooden pegs.
But must it come to this, O Goddess Fame,
That man may traffic on a stolen name? 30
One fellow is an after-dinner speaker,
Part fame-, part pleasure-, and part money-seeker;
Orates his jokes at breakfasts, dinners, teas,
And thinks he is the new Demosthenes.
Another teeming o'er with intellect,
Relieves his soul with verse in dialect;
His heart is full, he opens up the sluice,
And lo! a flood of Spring, and apple-juice,
And Sabine farms, and cows, and Rome, and hay
Escape. Lo! he's the Horace of the day! 40
He writes: "My monument is rustless brass!"
Without inscription let it stand for "ass."
Obscenity has fouled this other's pen,
And he exclaims: "Catullus lives again!"
And even women now astound the nation,
String lurid lyrics in alliteration,
Each burning with insatiate desire
To hear. "Lo! she hath strung the Sapphic lyre!"
The man who starts his millions cutting logs,
This other, grown in wealth by sticking hogs, 50

Each claims to be the only modern Croesus,
With sole and sacred right to rob and squeeze us.
Ere long there'll come a new Hesostratus
And burn the Pension Barn to make a fuss ;
For e'en the little names are not neglected :
This fellow by the tailor's skill perfected
Is bursting with ambition most sublime
To be the great Beau Brummel of his time.
Such lofty aspirations fill the hearts
Of petty men to play heroic parts !

60

And one great name, among the foremost, first,
Hath fared, among ill-fated names, the worst.
The great lawgiver, conqueror and king,
His name, indeed, hath grown a petty thing.
The nation saw his deeds, and trembling heard
His voice, and listened for his latest word ;
The nations sink his name in shallow wit,
And laughing, make a mockery of it,
Behold we have Napoleons of finance,
Napoleons of the turf and of the dance,
Napoleons of soap-makers and of thieves,
Napoleons packing pork, and slicing beeves,
Napoleons of delusions, shams and tricks,
And worst, Napoleons of politics.
Oh, poor, great man, sorry indeed thy fame
When every nincompoop may steal thy name !

70

But little William had no time to waste
On thoughts like these—besides, they're not his taste ;
He'd rather figure interest and duties
(And oh ! his little figures ! They are beauties !)

80

Content to hug his triple-plated crest,
The little tin Napoleon of the West!

Nay, nay, my good steel pen, my trusted friend,
Go not so fast, you'll land us at the end
Before we fairly start—and yet, to lurk
Too long upon the threshold of the work
Will break all rules of Horace and of sense
And make the gateway bigger than the fence.

Beyond a muddy river of the west,
(They call it golden, they who love it best, 90
Perchance because it hath a great unrest,
And tendency to rise, and fluctuate
And lift your house outside your garden gate ;
Or it may be, suggests some witty fellow,
Because both mud and gold are soft and yellow);
At any rate, beyond this stream, whose fountains
Flow past the smoky city from the mountains,
There lived, some years ago—we'll call it fifty—
An honest couple, fortunate and thrifty.
They boasted not of wealth, or noble blood, 100
They could not trace their line beyond the flood ;
But richer than the gilded kings of wealth
They drank the vintage of perpetual health ;
They bore no crest, no herald's trumpet rang
Announcements of their comings, but they sprang
From sires who fought to make their country free,
And formed the noblest aristocracy.
To this good couple, then, a son was born,
Some time betwixt the moon-rise and the morn,

He came as other babies, and he cried 110
 As other babies ; and his father's pride
 Came near to bursting him. I scarcely think
 This good man knew the soft delights of drink,
 And so he got not drunk ; 'but did amends
 By calling in his neighbors and his friends,
 And tapped his choicest cider keg, and made
 Good cheer. And when the doctor's bill was paid
 He called his cousins in to choose a name
 And start the youngster on the road to fame.
 Unlike the Chillinglys they had no tree, 120
 No famous names adorned their pedigree.
 One aunt suggested John—a cousin thought
 Of Charlemagne ; and so they fumed and fought,
 And after much annoyance, fuss and bother
 Agreed to call him William for his father.
 Now, little William grew as other boys,
 Outgrew his diapers and then his toys ;
 He donned his pants, and learned his A, B, Cs,
 He went to school and won in spelling-bees,
 And all the neighbors cried : " How smart he is ! " 130
 He never stole away to go in swimming,
 And so he never got a nightly trimming ;
 He never went afishing on a Sunday,
 And so he never smarted on a Monday ;
 Indeed, he was a very model boy,
 His father's pride, his mother's greatest joy.
 He wrote his copies well ; at figures quick
 He took the prizes in arithmetic ;
 He studied history because he must,
 But did not fancy such infernal dust ; 140

He wrote an essay on the Use of Iron,
But would have scoffed at reading Scott or Byron ;
He won the school debates, for he could shout
Louder than anyone, and he could spout
Whole yards of figures, quote the very price
Of everything, from engines down to mice ;
The numbers slipping smoothly from his tongue
As whiskey flowing 'round a leaky bung.

And so he grew, and waxed exceeding wise,
Although he waxed not greatly as to size ; 150
Within his bosom burned a filial fire
To follow in the footsteps of his sire.
In sooth he bade right fair to mix with men,
And be an honest, worthy citizen.

But woe the day, alas the sorry day !
Alas ! that rills can rivers turn astray !
That Fortune's wheel may whet the murderer's knife,
Or idle circumstances mar a life !
'Tis scarcely now remembered who began
This sad unmaking of a manly man. 160
It was an aunt or cousin, or perchance
One of those semi-aged girls who dance
Attendance on *imberbis juvenis*,
Seeking the unknown pleasure of a kiss,
Who planted fierce ambition's rankling grain
Within the fertile field of William's brain,
And gave him palpitation of the heart
By telling him he lookèd like Bonaparte !
He knew not very much of little Nap,
You know he kept no history on tap ; 170

But straightway to the nearest shop he flew,
 There purchased Abbott's Life, and read it through.
 What strange coincidences he could trace
 In both their lives! What likeness in the face!
 He posed before the glass, turned 'round and 'round
 And each new minute new resemblance found.
 Avaunt ye visions of the iron trade!
 Ye dreams of wealth by honest labor made
 Avaunt! Forsooth he now would be a king,
 And kingly power kingly wealth would bring. 180
 And lo! The while he planned, the occasion came
 All ready-made to carry him to fame,
 Rumors of change, and frantic utterings
 Of fierce fanatics, sullen mutterings
 Of dismal war were sweet within his ear,
 For as they grew he felt his kingdom near.
 He prayed: "God speed the internecine strife!"
 And gambling gallantly he staked his life.

Now William, though he'd never shot a gun, 1
 Had drilled a little with a wooden one. 190
 He hurried out and bought the latest make
 And went to war without a single quake.
 He thought that he, at least, could point it straight,
 And leave the rest to powder and to fate;
 Besides, he soon would be "*le Tête d'Armée*,"
 And view the battle fifteen miles away.
 But one by one his dreams began to vanish
 Wars are not won on paper—saving Spanish;
 Ere long he found that fighting didn't suit him,
 Some fellows on the other side might shoot him; 200

And being unprepared to go to hell
He told the general he could cater well.
At last, at last he had a bomb-proof place,
And ruled the pantry with right queenly grace;
Indeed, one day so well he served the food
They voted him a major, where he stood.
In twenty years no doubt, he might have fed
His way through rank and rank up to the head.
But others fought, and fought so fast and well
That half the flower of the Southland fell
Fighting as bravely; and the dismal night
Of four dark years gave way before the light,
The brilliant sunburst of a glorious peace
That pierced the clouds and bade the sorrow cease.

210

Behold the sorry sight, the nameless thing!
Sadder than plaintive bird with broken wing,
More feeble than the full moon after dawn,
A soldier with his occupation gone!

Poor William turned him home with aching heart,
And thumbed again his life of Bonaparte.
He had nor brother Lu nor brother Jo
To boost him up and tell him how to go.
He read, and found, at last, another chance,
For Bonaparte had penned the Code of France.
Then William studied law, but law and he
Could not combine, and did not quite agree
In the observance and the application;
But he would write new statutes for the nation!
Headforemost into politics he rushed
And from the nigh-forgotten well, up-gushed

220

230

Flood after flood of figures, facts and fiction,
Spreading in waves of most mellifluous diction
That bore him on to Congress in a hurry
Without the least excitement, noise or worry.
He flourished in a day of wondrous men,
He plied his facile tongue, his ready pen;
He talked about tin-plate and heavy armor,
He wrote about protection to the farmer;
Indeed he spoke of manufactured honey,
And some one says he wrote of silver money; 240
But faith, his tongue was better than his pen,
For ink, once dried, can never flow again.
At last he reached the summit of the hill,
And sitting down he wrote a tariff bill.
Ah, woe! The people read it with a frown,
Withdrew their confidence and turned him down.

He wandered home and read his book again,
Aha! Napoleon had governed men.
He knew, this time, he could not be mistaken,
Belief in self is naught if not unshaken. 250
He staked his all upon this last endeavor,
And grown in politics exceeding clever
He won by talking long and writing late
And came to be the governor of a State.

Then William, having nothing much to do
Began to wonder where the money grew.
He had the kingly power, but the gold
Seemed to elude him, as it did of old.
He pondered long the deep and vexing question,
Till suddenly a subtle, soft suggestion, 260

Flashed in the darkness like a golden taper;
“A silent partner and a piece of paper.”

A little while he rollicked in the clover,
But when his fleeting days of grace were over
They organized a company with stock
To take the New Napoleon out of hock.
He wrote and spoke and figured to the last,
Until they gagged and bound him hard and fast;
They bought him for a good consideration
And could not risk to spoil their speculation.
So fare thee well, and peaceful be thy rest,
Thou New Napoleon of the golden west.

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